The Builder.

No. CCCXLII.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 25, 1849.

OUR ecclesiastical structures of the twelfth century, massive, solid, dignified, and imposing, with their careful proportions and quaint carvings, are interesting objects for examination, and ever give pleasure to those who know how to observe. Even in ruin we do not merely see

> "A pile decayed,
> Bricks in cunning fashion laid,
> Ruined buttress, moss-clad stone,
> Arch with ivy overgrown,
> Stairs round which the lichens creep—
> The whole a desolated heap!"

But as a memorial of the olden time, telling of the feudal prime—

> "More than history can give
> With these ruined towers doth live!"

And the reflection arises—

> "Thus it is that vacant air,
> MIND informs with visions fair."

We are not about to speak, however, of what they suggest, but what they are. The number and grandeur of the edifices raised in the 12th century are matters for wonderment. As Mr. Freeman remarks, when speaking of the works of this extraordinary period, in his recent "History of Architecture"* (a work to which we owe a notice), "If art had not reached the same zenith of perfection as in the palmy days of Gothic skill, yet the number, vastness, and magnificence of its works attest alike the bounty of founders and the genius of architects. Within one hundred years, or little more, all the cathedral, and probably most of the existing conventual, churches in England were reconstructed, sometimes more than once, while many abbeys were newly founded, and parochial schools innumerable built or rebuilt. And, notwithstanding the transmutations which our churches have since undergone, the remains of this period are yet scattered profusely throughout our country, and in many of our most superb buildings it is the prevalent style. Majestic and awful rather than beautiful, no style is more religious, more imbued with the spirit and position of the church in its own day, the day when St. Anselm braved spoliation and banishment, and St. Thomas sealed his witness with his blood."

Every small village was furnished with a sound substantial church of stone, which in numerous cases has kept its promise of long endurance, and still serves to give stability and importance to the localities which, but for this, had lost their identity long ago. Even in a constructive point of view, they contrast unfavourably for our time with some of the churches of the day, which, cheap, flimsy, and unsubstantial, will not outlast the present generation. We have seen several specimens lately which are a positive disgrace to the parish, the architect, and the builder.

Winchester Cathedral, Gloucester Cathedral, Southwell, Tewkesbury, Rochester,† and others, described at different times in our pages, afford good examples of twelfth century buildings. In our present number we give a view of ROMSEY Abbey Church, taken from the north-east;* a structure which presents, as completely as any remaining, the outline and general appearance of a purely Norman Conventual Church. In its details, however, it is transitional. The pointed arch makes its appearance in various parts amongst the round arches, and at the western end of the nave the Early English style wholly prevails. A descriptive account of the church, by the Rev. J. L. Petit, will be found in our third volume (p. 446). We will here, therefore, only briefly say it was commenced, on the site of an earlier church, about the middle of the twelfth century; built (as Scott says of Lindisfarne),—

> —"Ere the art was known,
> By pointed aisle, and shafted stalk,
> The arcades of an alleyed walk
> To emulate in stone."

It is cruciform; there is a semi-circular absis on the east side of each arm of the transept, as was not unusual in Norman and Byzantine churches. Each aisle of the choir likewise terminates with a similar absis formed in the thickness of the wall, so as not to show externally. The west end contains a singularly lofty triple lancet window. In the south wall of the nave next the transept, one of the original Norman doorways remains, and is now used as a window. It presents a series of concentric arches adorned with various sculptured enrichments, and supported by two columns on either side, with enriched capitals. In the external wall of the south transept, next the door, is a curious sculptured figure of Christ on the cross, about 5½ feet high, and close down on the ground, with a hand from the clouds above pointing to it. Near it is a small recess in the wall, probably to receive a lamp or taper. Some of the capitals in the aisles, at the east end, are sculptured with figures of singular appearance, and have led to three communications to the Society of Antiquaries, printed in the "Archæologia."†

The tower, at the crux, is low and massive, and is surmounted by a monstrous modern abomination in the shape of a wooden enclosure for the bells, which suggests the idea of a brewhouse or a tanner's drying shed in Bermondsey. It seems exceedingly well adapted for—lighting the fires, to which luminous fate, and speedily, we, with our heartiest wishes, commend it.

A short time ago the interior of the church was restored under the able direction of Mr. B. Ferrey, at a cost, as we were told, of about 3,000*l*. At the present moment works are going on outside under the guidance of the churchwarden only, against which course we very earnestly protest. Structures of this kind are nationally important, and should not be touched except under proper advice. Mr. Jenvey may be a very good churchwarden, but he cannot be competent to meddle with the architecture of Romsey Abbey Church. Something is said about taking off the lead and putting slate in its stead; but we hope our expostulation may be in time to prevent the exhibition of so bad a principle, and induce application to a proper director.

Internally it is much to be regretted that the main arches of the chancel and its aisles have been blocked up,—possibly there were reasons for it, not apparent to the observer. With the new font (a melancholy imitation of Early English) the architect could not have had any thing to do. The old one, if we remember rightly, was much superior.

The transept internally is very interesting, but is marred by galleries. These ought to be removed.

The central tower was originally open as a lantern, and must have had a good effect; but, to form a chamber for the ringers in the upper part of it, at the time of erecting the wooden monstrosity already mentioned, a false ceiling was put in. At the recent restoration this ceiling was raised up somewhat, but still shuts off about 20 feet of the lantern. And here we find a little bone to pick with friend Ferrey. Not because the ceiling is there,—he would of course have wished to get rid of it altogether, if the authorities had been prepared to carry out another arrangement for the bells,—but for a little falsification which may tend to perpetuate the interpolated ceiling. Against the four sides of the lantern are attached-columns which run up to the top, and are therefore of course intersected by the modern ceiling, and what we object to is, that at this intersection, to form a finish inside, below the ceiling, Norman capitals have been introduced to terminate the columns, which may serve as an argument in years to come, when their modern date is forgotten, against those who may wish to restore to the church its crowning glory: an excusable crime after all, some will say; and we are quite willing to admit it.

Such of our readers as are led to devote one of these pleasant summer days to Romsey Abbey* should notice a touching little monument to the memory of the infant daughter of a surgeon of the town, modelled by himself. It is inscribed—

> "Is it well with the child?
> "It is well."

Near to it is a mural tablet, by Flaxman, to Henry, Viscount Palmerston, and his second wife.

The church has the advantage of a sexton, James Major, who seems to prize every stone of it, and whose intelligence and right feeling deserve a passing notice.

CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING THE REMOVAL OF SMITHFIELD MARKET.

IN matters connected with public health, it must be confessed by everybody at all competent to form an opinion, that there prevails in England a carelessness upon the part of the public in general, and a total absence of system upon that of the persons especially charged with its care. In no case has the truth of this observation been more painfully verified than in the recent attempt to obtain the removal of Smithfield Market. With the exception of the parties interested in the maintenance of this nuisance, everybody appears disposed to admit that it is desirable that it should be removed. A committee of the House of Commons has examined patiently a great number of witnesses, both for and against the removal; and finally, it has presented a report to the House to recommend the latter course. A witty member of the House utters some jokes, of very equivocal taste,—and the affair is shelved.

We Englishmen talk loudly, and praise ourselves much upon the high state of civilization of our country. The beauty of our capital; the infinite pains we take to maintain

---

* Published by Masters, Aldersgate-street, London.

† Parts of the interior of Rochester Cathedral are exceedingly interesting and instructive. The exterior has been miserably mangled and marred. The state of the great western door,—one of the finest specimens of an enriched Norman doorway in England,—is to be regretted; but if it would have no better treatment in restoration than some other parts have received, it is much better it should remain as it is.

* See p. 402.

† From Dr. Latham, Vol. XIV. p. 186; from Sir H. C. Englefield, following the former; and from W. Latham, Esq., Vol. XV., p. 304. "The length of this church, according to the curious description given in the addenda to Brown Willis's Mitred Abbies, is 246 feet; and its width, that is to say, the length of the transept, 120 feet. His words are:—'Ecclesia de Romesey, de fundatione regis Edgari, continet in longitudine circa 98 *stappys*, et param ultra; item in latitudine continet circa 46 *stappys* meas.' The height of the tower is about 120 feet, and that of the body of the church is said to be 80 exactly."—*Spencer's Descriptive Essay*, p. 37.

* Winchester Cathedral and the church of St. Cross are but a short distance from Romsey, and may be included in the jaunt.

To learn how to use PDF Compression and OCR go to ThePaperlessOffice.org